

THE SOPHIST, THE GODDESS AND THE VOID

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Abstract

This essay will present an alternative reading of Gorgias' "*On What is Not, or On Nature*" that locates the sophist's 'eristic logic' as a paradox disguised as wisdom and wisdom disguised as a paradox. In its critique of Heideggerian ontology this papers 'soph-eristic' approach attempts to de-necessitate ontology, the theory of 'is-ness', into an untenable position and in turn deactivate the ontological argument between being and what is not.

To quote from the last words of Hassan i Sabbah, Old Man of the Mountain." From William Burroughs novel *Cities of the Red Night*

Nothing is true. Everything is permitted.ⁱ

Introduction: The Sophist Effect

Andrew Goffey in his essay entitled "*If ontology, then politics: The sophist effect*" suggests that Barbara Cassin's use of the term, 'the sophist effect'ⁱⁱ:

primarily designates the manner in which sophistry puts philosophy 'outside of itself' by virtue of a practice of language that philosophical categories cannot assimilate, making sophistry philosophy's 'unsublatable' other. [...] Cassin is suggesting not only that philosophy is constituted around the exclusion of the sophist, but that philosophical discourse – or better, that

specific practice of language use which is philosophy – can only define itself in relation to sophistry (as its other). (Goffey 2001: 12)

Although these observations place sophistry as the playful and implacable other to philosophy, this remains problematic in the manner in which sophistry appears to be positioned as the dialectical opposite of philosophy. Admittedly Cassin's position on sophistry, as outlined here by Goffeyⁱⁱⁱ, seems preferable to Alain Badiou who sees sophistry as philosophy's immoral twin in suggesting that philosophy:

...loses its way when it feeds the dark desire to finish with the sophist once and for all [...] The ethics of philosophy is at heart to maintain the sophist as adversary, to preserve the polemos, the dialectical conflict. (Badiou 1992: 73-75)

This paper will suggest that another reading of the fragments of the ancient Greek sophist Gorgias' treatises, entitled "*On What is Not, or On Nature*" as preserved in the account of Sextus Empiricus and Pseudo-Aristotle,^{iv} could be to locate the sophist not as the playful or the immoral dialectical opposite of philosophy, and its epistemological and ontological claims to the Truth, nor as a parody of philosophy^v, but rather, as paradox disguised as wisdom and wisdom disguised as paradox.

The sophists, of 5th century Athens, have up until the present had a poor reputation, mainly as a continuing result of Plato's assault upon them for being 'professional teachers' of rhetoric and oratory, whose vain and empty arguments, which deal with words and not things, do not seek Truth but merely victory in debate through the use of dishonest means. In the dialogue Sophist, Plato writes:

...the tribe of Sophists is troublesome and hard to be caught [...] we must acknowledge that the Sophist is a clever rogue who will not be got out of his hole [...] See how, by his reciprocation

of opposites, the many-headed Sophist has compelled us, quite against our will, to admit the existence of not-being [...] The Sophist runs away into the darkness of not-being, in which he has learned by habit to feel about, and cannot be discovered because of the darkness of the place... (Plato 1953)

Plato's reactionary and somewhat authoritarian view and loathing of the 'many-headed' sophists does begin to make sense however when we see that Plato is shielding the Immortal Principle:

Truth. Knowledge. [...] The ideal that Socrates died for. The ideal that Greece alone possesses for the first time in the history of the world. It is still a very fragile thing. It can disappear completely. Plato abhors and damns the Sophists without restraint, not because they are low and immoral people [...] but because they threaten mankind's first beginning grasp of the idea of truth. (Pirsig 1989: 378)

Gorgias and Eris

Plato says of the sophist, '...he is of the moneymaking species. Eristic, disputatious, controversial, pugnacious and combative...' (Plato 1953). The sophist according to Plato is one who carries on controversies of the kind called 'Eristic', a term he uses to imply those who seek victory in argument through the use of rhetoric. Now this is an interesting term because 'eristic' is derived from the noun 'eris' meaning strife, quarrel, or contention and is also the name of the goddess of discord whom in ancient Greek myth is said to be responsible for initiating the Trojan Wars.^{vi} So is Plato wrong in accusing sophists like Gorgias of using Eristic argument; not at all, because it would seem to fit with the evidence from both Sextus Empiricus and Pseudo-Aristotle.

Gorgias argument is not dialectical in the sense of an investigation set up to establish the truth through discussion of two apparently contradicting ideas. Gorgias' argument doesn't fit this description in that it appears contradictory, even nonsensical^{vii}, and at times illogical. Therefore, could it be argued that Gorgias is employing 'Anti-logic', a term 'used by Plato to refer to the device of opposing one logos to another logos by contradiction' This contradictory anti-logic brings about either an adoption of both logoi in the form of an aporia, or the abandoning on one or other of the logos based on personal judgement or choice. This doesn't seem to fit with what we find in "*On What is Not, or On Nature*". Here we see an eristic approach that is not a technique of argumentation nor does it appear to be concerned with truth; yet equally it does not appear to be concerned with simply winning, or being seen to win, an argument. Rather Gorgias' eristic approach illustrates the paradox in all claims to truth about the nature of knowledge and being.

In the three stages of "*On What is Not, or On Nature*" Gorgias suggests; firstly, that nothing has being; secondly, that even if it does have being then this could not be comprehended; and thirdly, even if it could be comprehended then it could not be communicated to anyone else. It has to be acknowledged that much controversy has raged over both the meaning and seriousness of this treatise^{viii} 'nowadays scholars are more inclined to take it seriously, and to think that it might even have been a work of philosophy in response to the monism of Parmenides' (Waterfield 2000: 223). This is an intriguing point in that it offers up Gorgias' text as a critique of Parmenides theory that 'only being exists', which Heidegger see as a radical transgression or going beyond of every possible being to reveal the being of Beings. By throwing ontology into a condition of uncertainty Gorgias, in his eristic style, deactivates the ontological opposition between being and non-being.

Parmenides had destroyed the manifold world of appearances but retained the unitary world of True Being, Gorgias cleared the slate completely, and was left with simply - nothing.

(Kerferd 1995: 94)

This form of sophistic nihilism significantly undermines both Parmenides and Heidegger's theory of being, by making it rather unlikely, in a world where there appears to be nothing rather than something, that any subject can be found on which to hang the verb 'to be'.

Leaving Heidegger for the moment and returning to the first stage of "*On What is Not, or On Nature*", what can be seen is a convoluted style that appears almost to mock the use of language in philosophy:

If something has being, it is either something with being, or something without being, or both something with being and something without being. [...] But it is not the case that something with being has being; *because* something without being has no being either. [...] it is *also* not the case that something with being and something without being have being. (Gorgias 2000: 232)

In another text entitled "*The Encomium of Helen*" Gorgias sets out in sophistic fashion to 'save a woman from infamy; [...] to dispel the injustice of blame and ignorance of men's beliefs; [...] as amusement for myself.' (Gorgias 2000: 231) Gorgias picks the subject of a woman much maligned for weakness and infidelity and responsible for the first war among men. He uses his powers of rhetoric to persuade Helen's detractors of their errors and ignorance. In this text he gives to words the same power over:

...the arrangements of the mind as that of drugs [...] For just as various drugs expel various humours from the body, and some put an end to illness while others put an end to life, so some words cause distress, others pleasure, and others fear, while some arouse courage in those who hear them, and others drug and bewitch the mind by some evil persuasion. (Gorgias 2000: 230)

Gorgias shows in this surviving ‘display speech’, how philosophers communicate viewpoints about things of which they are undecided: ‘since beliefs are treacherous and insecure they bring those relying on them treacherous and insecure success’ (Gorgias 2000: 229). This relates closely to “*On What is Not, or On Nature*” in the way Gorgias is suggesting that everything is unclear and rhetoric can be used to argue any point, even to redeem the apparently irredeemable Helen. In both texts he argues that communication seems impossible precisely because things are unclear and because no definite answer can be found to the paradox between being and non-being.

If the first stage of “*On What is Not, or On Nature*” seems critical of claims to determine the existence of things - ontology; the second stage, appears critical of our ability to claim certain knowledge of things - epistemology; and the third stage gives the impression of being critical of claims to communicate this knowledge - hermeneutics; we begin to see that throughout this text Gorgias undermines philosophical claims to reasoned logic. Even if we sceptically accept that something has being (which Gorgias appears reluctant to do at the end of the first stage) we must confront the idea that no human being could apprehend it. The style throughout this treatise can best be described as ‘eristic’ in the manner in which it puts forward an argument that has many similarities to ‘Buddhist logic, i.e. *It is X, it is not X, it is both X and not X, it is neither X nor not X*’ (Wilson 1999: 178). A form of logic concerned with both nothing and the many, in contrast to the ‘essentialism’ of Aristotelian logic of the kind: *It is either X or not X*, which is concerned with the one and the many.

William Blake’s famous line, from his ‘Letters on Sight and Vision’, ‘Now I a fourfold vision see’^{ix} has a kinship to this ‘soph-eristic’ approach that also appreciate a ‘fourfold vision’ which undermines philosophy’s claims to metaphysical Truth. In place of Truth the sophist uses language that argues for a form of relativism. But not a total moral relativism where everything and anything goes; rather, it is one that denies a fundamentalist, either/or logic, and welcomes into the equation the possibility of a ‘maybe’. Gorgias eristic argumentation suggests that something may have being or that

something maybe without being; while accepting the possibility that it is just as plausible that something may comprise both being and non being, and/both consist of something that appears as neither being, nor not being.

And what makes Gorgias eristic logic so subtly appealing is that all that appears above could just as easily be applied to nothing:

And so nothing has being (*think about the three ways in which the last three words can be interpreted: affirmation, negation and domination*); even if something had being, it would be unknowable, and even if it were knowable, no one can communicate it to anyone else, because events are not spoken words, and because no two people's conceptions are the same. (Gorgias 2000: 239)

One argument as to why philosophers have mostly dismissed Gorgias' treatises as a joke is that philosophy, by its very definition, cannot comprehend all aspects of a fourfold vision simultaneously; instead philosophers have chosen to dissect these 'visions' one at a time and dismiss those that they consider illogical. Philosophy has a monocular vision that looks for the one or the particular of the many, whereas sophistry can comprehend the many parts of the one while synchronistically looking, feeling, and listening for the nothing.

Isn't this argument simply leading us into the unending void of solipsism or some neo-Berkeleyan Idealism? The sophist would claim quite the reverse, suggesting that only if we pursue the ascetic dualism of certainty versus uncertainty, as it appears in the binary opposition of Aristotelian logic, do we lead ourselves into just such an impasse. In eristic logic we do not have to choose between Pure Certainty and Pure Uncertainty, for the simple fact that there are infinite choices in-between the extremes of the one and the many.

This position, so often dismissed as nihilistic relativism, would, from the sophists perspective once again, be considered in the reverse, in the way that nihilism, in its passive form, only remain the case if we cannot avoid pointing and defining everything around us with the third-person present singular of the verb 'to be'. Unless one clearly avoids the 'is' of identity then debate will quickly spiral into nonsense. To give a short example of this, one cannot say that for the scientist the moon **is** the natural satellite of the earth composed of aluminium, calcium, iron, silicon and other elements and for the poet it **is** the three faced goddess of Hecate, Artemis and Selene, because we do not create our own reality; we create our own model of reality. The difference being that the scientist perceives the moon as a satellite, and right now does not (or will not) perceive it as anything else, and framing her experience in this way, ignoring other factors, creates this *reality-tunnel*^x. The poet perceives the moon as a three-headed goddess, and right now does not (or will not) perceive it as anything else, and framing her experience in this way, ignoring other factors, creates this reality-tunnel. The sophist will accept that this does not solve the problems between scientists and poets, but it moves the situation into an area where people can meaningfully take responsibilities for the choices they make.^{xi} The philosopher, in his constant grasping for the 'is' of identity would appear to have forgotten that all that is, is metaphor.

Aretê

The sophists are attacked by Plato for their use of rhetoric in favour of his own 'Socratic Dialogues' a process of cross-examination for arriving at the one sole Truth. Aristotle challenges this belief suggesting that Plato's dialectic was really only appropriate for the purpose of enquiring into our beliefs about eternal forms. He suggested that alongside the dialectic there is also the method of science that can be used to examine physical facts and arrive at truths about substances that undergo change. However, if Plato and Aristotle were in disagreement over their approach to the dialectic they appeared

to be much closer in the attitude towards the sophists use of rhetoric. In the dialogue Gorgias, ‘Pla-socrates’^{xii} turns rhetoric into an object that is shown to have parts and unchanging relationships that can be dissected and used to discredit it as ambiguous and misleading. And Rhetoric fares no better under Aristotle who divides and sub-divides it and suggests that Rhetoric is no science but rather an art and must be reduced to a rational system of order (Aristotle, 2005: 66).

The character of Phaedrus in Robert M. Pirsig’s novel *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, is furious at the way in which these two ancient Greek philosophers had treated rhetoric. Phaedrus believes that the sophists use rhetoric in response to the pre-Socratic philosophers who all set out to establish a universal Immortal Principle. Thales called it Water, Anaximenes referred to it as Air, Heraclitus named it Fire and introduces change as part of the immortal principle, and Anaxagoras identified the One as *nous* or ‘mind’. But it was Parmenides who made the immortal principle the One, Truth, and separated it from appearances and opinion. The sophists, according to Pirsig, use rhetoric to question the ideas of these pre-Socratic ‘Cosmologists’. They were challenging the idea that there was any single absolute truth and in its stead they sought the improvement of mankind. The sophists argued that all principles and all truths were relative; and in the well-known words of the sophist Protagoras ‘man is the measure of all things’.

In their goal of improving mankind the sophists taught two things, rhetoric and aretê (or virtue). But how can you teach virtue if you also teach relativity in all things? Pirsig gives an answer to this question that suggests that aretê referred to something quite different in ancient Greece than it does today. Aretê lies at the heart of the Homeric Hero^{xiii}, who is not motivated by a sense of duty to others but by a duty to self. This Stirneresque, egoist aretê relates to excellence and a duty towards ones self that is also, Pirsig informs us, equivalent to his own use of the term Quality and to the Sanskrit word Dharma.

Quality! Virtue! Dharma! That is what the Sophists were teaching! Not ethical relativism. Not pristine ‘virtue.’ But *aretê*. Excellence. [...] Those first teachers of the Western world were teaching *Quality*, and the medium chosen was that of rhetoric. [...] ‘Man is the measure of all things.’ Yes, that’s what [Phaedrus] is saying about Quality. Man is not the *source* of all things, as the subjective idealists would say. Nor is he the passive observer of all things, as the objective idealist would say. The Quality which creates the world emerges as a *relationship* between man and his experience. He is a *participant* in the creation of all things. The *measure* of all things – it fits. And they [the sophists] taught rhetoric. (Pirsig 1898: 378-381)

Pirsig’s concept of Quality also relates to ideas presented in the third section of Gorgias’ “*On What is Not, or On Nature*” where he suggests that unbridgeable gaps exist between things that make communication impossible.

[T]here is an enormous difference between visible bodies and spoken words; that which is visible is grasped by one organ and the spoken word by another. Therefore the spoken word cannot communicate... (Gorgias 2000: 236)

Gorgias indicates throughout this third section that firstly, there is a gap between the spoken word and the event being spoken of; secondly, that there is a gap between the spoken word and our sense impression; thirdly, a gap between our sense impression and our corresponding thoughts; and fourthly between one persons thoughts and their ability to communicate this to another. Pirsig also deals with this gap, which he refers to as ‘preintellectual reality’ in his explanation of Quality, which reveals through its own uncertain logic that there appears to be nothing in the world rather than something? That quite literally, nothing comes before Quality.

The past exists only in our memories, the future only in our plans. The present is our only reality. The tree that you are aware of intellectually, because of the small time lag, is always in the past and therefore is always unreal. *Any* intellectually conceived object is *always* in the past and therefore *unreal*. Reality is always the moment of vision *before* the intellectualization takes place. *There is no other reality*. This preintellectual reality is what Phaedrus felt he had properly identified as Quality. Since all intellectually definable things must emerge *from* this preintellectual reality, Quality is the *parent*, the *source* of all subjects and objects. (Pirsig 1989: 250)

This discovery of Quality as a ‘preintellectual reality’; pre-existing the act of reflection and representation, registers ‘only’ as a metaphor and ‘only’ as an illusion; however, in true sophist fashion this ‘only’ appears all too lightly employed. The eristic approach suggests everything registers ‘only’ as a metaphor and ‘only’ as illusion, and as was stated above, ‘all that is, is metaphor’ but these metaphors have consequences, they create our reality tunnels. The reflective attitude, the act of representation, rather than discovering a reality or masking a Platonic hidden realm of ideal forms, actually creates a model of the world: the reflective act bringing a reality into being out of nothing. We do not require of Quality the act of removing the mask from reality to reveal the truth of existence. The mask is all there is and the strength of Pirsig’s concept of Quality is that at its bravest it reveals this in all its multiplicity and rawness.

As a site of potential resistance to subject/object metaphysics, Pirsig’s Quality appears to be able to challenge various aspects of habitual thought concerning interpretation, representation, variation and recurrence. This mode of resistance appears as more a kind of action or becoming rather than a fixed philosophical position; and as a mode of action or becoming it evolves into what Pirsig refers to in his second novel Lila: An Inquiry into Morals, as Dynamic Quality ‘the source of all things, the pre-intellectual cutting edge of reality’ (Pirsig 1991: 172). Dynamic Quality (DQ) as a mode of resistance

allows the migration of the four exhaustive, but not exclusive, static patterns of existence (inorganic, biological, social and intellectual) to evolve through dynamic conflict to higher levels of existence. However, this DQ needn't be understood simply as the creative projection that unconceals a pre-intellectual world, mainly because this drags it back into the subject/object metaphysics that it attempts to shake off. DQ, understood as the pre-intellectual cutting edge of reality, arises out of our subjective contact with the objective world, whether this is rational, empirical, transcendental or phenomenological. In this sense Pirsig's DQ take place through our contact with nature as it does in the romantic ideas of Kant, Rousseau and Schelling. Just as they present art as the highest manifestation of some creative force already at work in nature, Pirsig presents DQ as a creative force that gives us the ability to invent narratives which we have a tendency to forget that we have created in the first place or have ideologies and conspiracies to help us forget that they are human, all too human narratives.

Strife

The world for Pirsig is not already there and miraculously brought into being. It is DQ that sets forth both *world* (the realm Heidegger refers to as the human activity of cultural and society and which Pirsig calls the social and intellectual patterns) and *earth* (Heidegger's physical world and Pirsig's inorganic and biological patterns). Quality creates both *world* and *earth* (all four of Pirsig's patterns) from nothing. *Earth* and *world* emerge out of nothing from the chaotic narrative that we create through our use of DQ, which we then structure and order in a myriad of ways. Every age and culture, every civilisation and society, has its forms of narrative order from Ancient and classical civilisation up to and including that which in the present Jacques Camatte refers to as 'the Despotism of Capital'. However, this order is not only ephemeral, mutable and continually ascending via entropy back to chaos, but more significantly it is also always an illusion of order, of structure, of chaos, of something, and of being.

Where Heidegger states in The Origin of the Work of Art that *world* is set up via art, and *earth* is that which is already there but not made apparent; he would appear to be suggesting that *world* is shaped from *earth* but only as a result of resistance and not merely as a copy of it. Art requires this association of *earth* and *world*; it is the setting forth of their relationship that appears to be one of conflict or what Heidegger refers to as '*streit*' [strife]. This creative *strife*, (and let us not forget that the term 'eristic' is derived from the noun 'eris' meaning strife) that is forced into the open by the work of art in order to bring *world* and *earth* into conflict, has kinship both to the sophists eristic style and with Pirsig's DQ, as that which creates the conflict between inorganic, biological, social and intellectual patterns. However, for Pirsig, Quality comes before *earth*, *world* and art in the sense that the work of art is proof of Qualities prior existence; for without Quality, he suggests, '[t]here is no point to hanging a painting on the wall when the bare wall looks just as good.' (Pirsig 1989: 219) This idea that quality comes before *earth*, *world* and art, suggests that we create art to bring *world* and *earth* into *strife* to reveal the contingent nature of existence. However, can we really say, as Heidegger does quite persuasively, that *strife* reveals the Being of beings, that 'Truth wills to be established in the work as this strife of world and earth.' (Heidegger 2002: 187) Strife, Heidegger suggests, unconceals the Truth and is that which enables us to make the leap to beings existence over non-being and provide us with something rather than nothing. However, would it not be better to side with Nietzsche when he writes in his notebooks: 'The world as a work of art that gives birth to itself' (Nietzsche 1968: 419).

This *strife* or Dynamic Quality creates our model of the world, this simulacrum, which gives origin to its own existence; and although DQ allows us the opportunity to look into and create a narrative from the void or nothing, what we are faced with is an insurmountable anxiety. Our being, which philosophy comprehends through its opposition, non-being, is then confronted by this absurdity of defining its existence either as a mirror of itself or in opposition to that which it cannot be, non-being. Being is then exposed to the infinite possibilities of DQ, a nothingness, where 'nothing is true and everything is permissible' and where there are no values or morals only total responsibility for one

constantly changing self and its actions; an existential responsibility which is always present and within our grasp but which the pessimist may well argue is too great for the present human condition. Gripped by fear in this state of anxiety, our intuitive response to DQ is to create narratives or reality tunnels of some-thing, of being, of self; in order to repel this nothingness and give us the opportunity to return to our passively nihilistic, if some-what ironic, existence where we live with this overwhelming sense of nothingness but leap into the bad faith of believing in some thing.

Angst

In Being and Time Heidegger, in his response to his reading of Soren Kierkegaard's 'Concept of Anxiety'^{xiv} writes:

How far is anxiety a state-of-mind which is distinctive? How is it that in anxiety Dasein gets brought before itself through its own being, so that we can define phenomenologically the character of the entity disclosed in anxiety, and define it as such in its Being, or make adequate preparations for doing so? (Heidegger 2000: 228) [...] That *about which* anxiety is anxious reveals itself as that *in the face of which* it is anxious – namely, Being-in-the-world. (233) [...] All understanding is accompanied by a state-of-mind. Dasein's mood brings it face to face with the thrownness of its 'that it is there'. *But the state-of-mind which can hold open the utter and constant threat to itself arising from Dasein's ownmost individualized Being, is anxiety.* In this state-of-mind, Dasein finds itself *face to face* with the "nothing" of the possible impossibility of its existence (310).

Heidegger appears to be suggesting that in a state anxiety we will begin to realise that we have been thrown into the world and that our life and death, our very being as such, is an issues that we are forced to confront.

The indefiniteness of death is primordially disclosed in anxiety. But this primordial anxiety strives to exact resoluteness of itself. It moves out of the way everything that conceals the fact that Dasein has been abandoned to itself. The “nothing” with which anxiety brings us face to face, unveils the nullity by which Dasein, in its very *basis*, is defined; and this basis itself is as thrownness into death. (Heidegger 2000: 356)

Anxiety seems for Heidegger to be the situation from which Dasein discloses its relationship to the world in which it finds itself thrown. This is an existential existence full of choices and dread but also an existence both defined by and bound to the “nothing”.

In both Introduction to Metaphysics and What is Metaphysics? Heidegger becomes preoccupied with the “nothing” and this questioning becomes an important theme that can be read as a link between his earlier and later work. In What is Metaphysics? Heidegger states that:

‘Anxiety reveals the nothing [...] robs us of speech. Because beings as a whole slip away, so that just the nothing crowds round, in the face of anxiety all utterance of the “is” falls silent. That in the malaise of anxiety we often try to shatter the vacant stillness with compulsive talk only proves the presence of the nothing. That anxiety reveals the nothing man himself immediately demonstrates when anxiety has dissolved...that in the face of which and for which we were anxious was “properly”- nothing. Indeed: the nothing itself-as such-was there.’
(Heidegger 2002: 101)

Heidegger in his dealing with the nothing seems to position it as that which seems to slip our modes of representation in moments of intellectual confusion and hopelessness. But would it not be fairer to suggest that nothing can be seen in a more optimistic light than this temporary inability to represent our imperfectly remembered 'vision' and 'feeling' of nothing. Would it not be better to suggest that out of this nothing our response to DQ gives us the ability to create our own models of existence. In this way nothing becomes transformed into something, non-being into being, but always as an abstraction of nothing, as a static mode of understanding that which expresses representation. Through DQ we create our own reality tunnels in the face of this all-encompassing nothing that appears as the Being of beings.

Heidegger suggests that anxiety robs us of speech and Being as a whole slips away. Yet both Being and beings can only be defined in relation to its opposite, non-being; and in this sense being would appear to be nothing, fixed and defined in a human, all too human way. For Heidegger, being or rather the Being of beings, the being that questions its being, Dasein, comes before nothing; being is the ground upon which nothing is experienced as the inability to speak because of anxiety. But what if nothing comes before being, what if nothing is the ground from which Dasein is created. Anxiety then reveals the possible impossibility of nothingness, out of which our use of DQ creates Dasein.

Just as Plato suggests that it is extremely difficult to see and talk about, if not impossible, to speak of the Ideal Forms; Heidegger states that the nothing is unspeakable because it alludes the powers of representation. Yet, would it not be more appropriate to suggest that the nothing could be spoken of. That it is actually always spoken of, all of the time, because it is all conversation, all discussion, all discourse and discourses. This is because all conversation and all discourse are ultimately and always nothing.

However, one cannot give the meaning of nothing via the creative dynamics of Quality anymore than one can give the meaning of a dance or particular way of life. To ask the meaning of nothing is to make a category mistake. It is like asking the weight of an idea or the meaning of the Greek language. As

Heidegger says in relation to scientific questions into the logic of being and thinking, in his Letter on Humanism:

Thinking is judged by a standard that does not measure up to it. Such judgements may be compared to the procedure of trying to evaluate the essence and power of a fish by seeing how long it can live on dry land.

(Heidegger 2002: 219)

Notes

ⁱ “The Last Words of Hassan i Sabbah, Old Man of the Mountain.” In William Burroughs Cities of the Red Night Picador London 1982 p. 145.

ⁱⁱ Cassin, B. L’effet sophistique Paris: Gallimard, 1995.

ⁱⁱⁱ This position was also restated by Barbara Cassin during her paper “Sophistic Practices of Language” delivered at the research seminar, Middlesex University May 19th 2005, chaired by Ray Brassier and attended by both Andrew Goffey and myself.

^{iv} Two versions of this text exist; Sextus Empiricus Against the Professors 7.65.1-86.11 and Pseudo-Aristotle, On Melissus, Xenophanes, and Gorgias, 979^a12-980^b21

^v To quote W.K.C. Guthrie, “A Grate deal of ink has been spilt over the question whether [Gorgias treatise “*On What is No, or On Nature*”] was intended as a joke or parody, or as a serious contribution to philosophy, but it is a mistake to think that parody is incompatible with serious intentions.” (1995: 193-194)

^{vi} According to ancient Greek myths (see Robert Graves The Greek Myths: Vol. 2 (159.e) Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1960), Zeus was preparing a wedding banquet for Peleus, the king of Phthia, and Thetis, a sea goddess. All the gods and goddesses had been invited except Eris, the goddess of discord, because of her reputation as a troublemaker. This made Eris angry and so she fashioned an apple of pure gold and inscribed upon it KALLISTI (“To The Prettiest One”) and on the day of the fete she rolled it into the banquet hall. Now three of the invited goddesses, Athena, Hera and Aphrodite, each immediately claimed it to belong to her because of the inscription. An enormous quarrel broke out with much shouting and fighting and finally Zeus calmed the whole thing down and declared that an arbiter must be selected, which was a reasonable suggestion, and all agreed. Paris, the son of King Priam of Troy, was selected to judge the dispute. However, each of the sneaky goddesses tried to outwit the others by going to Paris and offering him bribes. Athena offered him Heroic War Victories, Hera offered him Great Wealth, and Aphrodite offered him The Most Beautiful Woman on Earth. Being a healthy young

Trojan lad, Paris promptly accepted Aphrodite's bribe and she got the prize. Aphrodite, true to her word, manoeuvred earthly happenings so that Paris could have Helen (the Helen, of Gorgias' 'Encomium') who was already married to King Menelaus of Sparta. When Helen met Paris she falls instantly in love with him and when the pair fled back to Troy, Menelaus and his brother, Agamemnon, organised a large Greek expedition against Troy to win Helen back. And so began the ten year siege of Troy which began the Trojan Wars, said to be the first wars among men.

^{vii} Guthrie W.K.C. "It is all of course, engaging nonsense." 1969 p197 n. 2.

^{viii} For an in-depth discussion of these debates see Kerferd 1995: 93-100 and Guthrie 1969: 197.

^{ix} Taken from William Blake's "Letters on Sight and Vision" written to Thomas Butts (November 22nd 1802)

Now I a fourfold vision see,
 And a fourfold vision is given to me;
 'Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
 And threefold in soft Beulah's night
 And twofold always. May God keep
 From single vision & Newton's sleep!

^x To borrow a phrase from the brilliant, if much maligned, Dr. Timothy Leary [Info-Psychology](#) 1994.

^{xi} The ideas presented in this paragraph are based upon the thoughts, words and ideas of Robert Anton Wilson, especially Chapter Two of *Quantum Psychology* 2004.

^{xii} Pla-socrates is a term used to draw attention to Plato's dramatic Dialogues in which he plays the role of his great teacher, Socrates.

^{xiii} For a more detailed discussion of how Homer and the Greeks use the word aretê, see H.D.F. Kitto *The Greeks* p. 171-175.

^{xiv} See Heidegger 2000: 492 n. vi

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